

# The Builder.

No. CCCCVII.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1850.



**H**OSE among our readers who remember the remarks we have made, from time to time, on the antagonistic position of the Referees and the Registrar, at the Office of Metropolitan Buildings, the constantly-occurring appeals for decision of their differences to the Office of Works, the consequent delay, and contradictory awards, will not be surprised to learn that an inquiry has been instituted by Lord Seymour, as Chief Commissioner of Works, to discover, if possible, where the fault lies. Two gentlemen (whether the right men or not we will not now inquire) have been appointed to hear and examine the statements of the parties concerned, and to decide, if possible, whether the evil is to be attributed to provisions in the Act, or to the officers personally. If the former, an endeavour will be made, in the new Bill, to produce a different result: if the latter, there will probably be changes in the office. The inquiry has been conducted in secrecy, and we shall not render that abortive by communicating any of the facts that have transpired, or speculate on the probable issue. Suffice it, that we set at rest by this statement some unfounded rumours, in connection with the office, that have been forwarded to us. As respects the clauses in the Bill brought forward in 1849 (and now pending), which would transform the Buildings' office into a law court, make the registrar sole arbitrator, and the referees his clerks, the objection on the part of the builders is, as might have been expected, very decided. Our own opinion on the point we expressed at length on the first appearance of the Bill.

An argument against the exemption of the works of railway companies from the supervision of the official referees, has been afforded by the bridge belonging to the South-Eastern Railway, over Joiner-street, Tooley-street. One of the patent girders, it will be remembered, failed in October last,\* and the safety of the remaining girders being questioned, especially under the circumstances in which, through the alteration of the station, they will now be placed, Mr. Brunel and Sir John Reunie were appointed to inquire and report on the subject. The statement by Mr. Barlow, the company's engineer, that there were 120 tons weight on the girder when it broke, was questioned in our journal, and a doubt expressed whether the engineer could wisely test the remaining girders with half that weight. Last week the remaining girders were tested by placing carefully, upon a certain defined space of the upper surface of the bridge, iron chairs of known weight. When 148 tons were upon the area the two girders broke. One, 42 feet 2 inches bearing, it is calculated, had upon it 67 tons, 3 cwt., the other, 46 feet bearing, 60 tons, 12 cwt. In this experiment, it must be remembered, the load was applied uniformly all over the girder, and the road-construction, which is of considerable weight, was first removed.

The outside girder, still remaining, has a bearing of 57 feet 3 inches, and is only of the

same strength and construction. We have not yet seen Messrs. Brunel and Reunie's report but do not hesitate to assume that they will assert the necessity of strengthening the bridge.

The occasion for caution, which we felt it to be our duty to urge upon the designers and contractors for the iron building in Hyde-park, is now being repeated by some of our contemporaries. We have received several letters, too, on the subject from professional coadjutors. One of the least urgent amongst them says:—

"On examining the construction of the building for the Exhibition of 1851, from the drawings exhibited at the Society of Arts, the idea suggests itself that *additional strength* is required in the construction of the ironwork for the centre avenue: when you bear in mind its great span (75 feet), and the weight it would have to support, independently of other circumstances it would also have to contend against, some precaution appears necessary to be taken. I would therefore throw out the suggestion, whether it might not be advisable to introduce circular ribs between the pillars and the girders, with ornamental spandrels, which would not only strengthen the present construction, but also improve the general appearance of the whole. With reference to the gallery floors, perhaps, the boards there should be laid with apertures between them, to enable the dust to pass through into an enclosed space underneath, in order to prevent the dust and dirt from being swept or falling on the different articles underneath. How is the snow to be got off the roof, and the glass cleared?"

There are other parts of the construction, however, which need serious attention, as must be felt by any who will observe the great heights of the columns, tier over tier, in the centre, the manner in which the girders are secured to the columns, the size and weight of the wooden ribs prepared to form the ends of the transept, the nature of the foundation, and the strains to which the building will be subjected. We make these remarks in no cavilling spirit, but from a feeling of duty: not to excite any alarm, but to prevent a disaster.† Some additional precautions have been taken since our first comments, but others are still necessary.

Against our will we are forced, further, to object to the mode of painting proposed by Mr. Owen Jones, to whom it seems this portion of the undertaking has been confided. Anything more vulgar than the specimen put up we have not seen for some time.

We must except, however, from this comparison, the decoration of the pendentives of the Whittington Club's great room, in the Strand, the once famous "Crown and Anchor" meeting room. This excellent and thriving club,† have spent about 400*l.* in the decoration of the room, under the direction of Mr. Freeman, architect, and they opened it to the members last week. The tone of the whole is somewhat sickly: contrasts have been feared. What marble the pilasters are veined to represent it is hard to divine. We should not have made any remark, however, but for the unsightly caricatures, in the shape of boys with the legs of gouty men (representing Science, Music, &c.), painted on the pendentives of the cupola. In those times when every tavern and tea-garden begins to exhibit an approach to artistical decoration, such monstrosities must not be permitted in

\* According to informants, a girder failed last week under a comparatively trifling weight, and led to a fatal accident. To an occurrence of this sort, however, so importance need be attached, excepting as to the personal result.

† It has now about 1,800 members. In the new list of members we observe Mr. Donaldson is announced for two: "On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient and Medieval Times; as illustrated in their Sacred and Civil Edifices."

an educational institution like the Whittington Club. That respectable decorators like Messrs. Trollope, who were employed, could have left them as they are surprises us. If they have any regard for their own reputation, they will forthwith remove them and put in something like art.

Before concluding our gossip, we would say a few words to the correspondents who have addressed us in consequence of a brief remark on *Malvern Abbey Church, Worcester-shire*, which appeared in a recent number of *THE BUILDER*. They all admit the main point of objection, namely, that the works have been carried on without professional superintendence, and one of them will not disguise the fact, he says, that one of the main arches exposed to view by lowering the organ gallery has been unnecessarily blocked up again by a painted lion and unicorn. A building such as this belongs to posterity, and should be treated with the utmost care. Our end will be answered, if the remark should lead the zealous churchwardens to take proper advice as to the future works which ought shortly to be commenced. The beautiful tower is in a miserable condition, and seems to want immediate attention.

Malvern is a cross church, as many of our readers will remember, with the tower at the cross. The nave-piers, and arches, are Norman, but the exterior of the church is Perpendicular, and is ascribed to Sir Reginald Bray, who designed Henry the Seventh's Chapel at Westminster. The chancel is a fine composition; the clerestory windows throughout are very large; the north porch, which is at the extreme west end, a very interesting specimen. There was a series of memorial windows in the church, but in those times when mistaken zeal

"Rent  
Altar and screen and ornament,  
And peasant hands the tombs o'erthrew,"

these were greatly destroyed: much of the old glass, however, yet remains, and some modern glass has been added. Some of the figures in the old windows were engraved by Strutt for his "Manners and Customs," and by John Carter, in his "Ancient Sculpture and Painting." There is an illustrated account of the church in Neale's "Views of Collegiate Churches." The faldstool engraved in "The Glossary" is from the stained glass here: many of the paving-tiles remaining are exceedingly curious. Again we say to the churchwardens: Let nothing be done to this interesting old structure but under proper advice: better be idle than do harm.

## THE GENEALOGY OF THE FINE ARTS.

My endeavour in the following remarks is to sketch a theory of art generally, which I attempt under the conviction that some of its branches are not fully appreciated even by those who take an interest in its manifestations. By a large proportion of educated persons, the arts of painting and sculpture are classed among mere amusements, or hobbies, and considered only as vehicles for the display of talent, affording at the most a refined species of pleasure to the observer. Of architecture they have no idea as one of the means of intellectual enjoyment and improvement to man. They see nothing in it but brick or stone, and wood, formed and arranged to serve certain purposes of utility, presenting at the farthest a clue to the condition, as to wealth or station, of the occupant of the structure. Very few, I apprehend, think of art as of an influence to move the heart, or suppose it has functions to perform, and ends to fulfil, in any way connected with the moral sense and intellectual progress of mankind.

This has, I suspect, been a result of the excessive commercial development of our civil-